Antivirus software
McAfee VirusScan Online and Panda Antivirus Titanium

Most people tend not to worry about antivirus protection until things go horribly wrong. Trust us, it's better to invest in a good package now. Both McAfee and Panda are stalwarts of the antivirus industry and they're vying for your cash with two very different products.
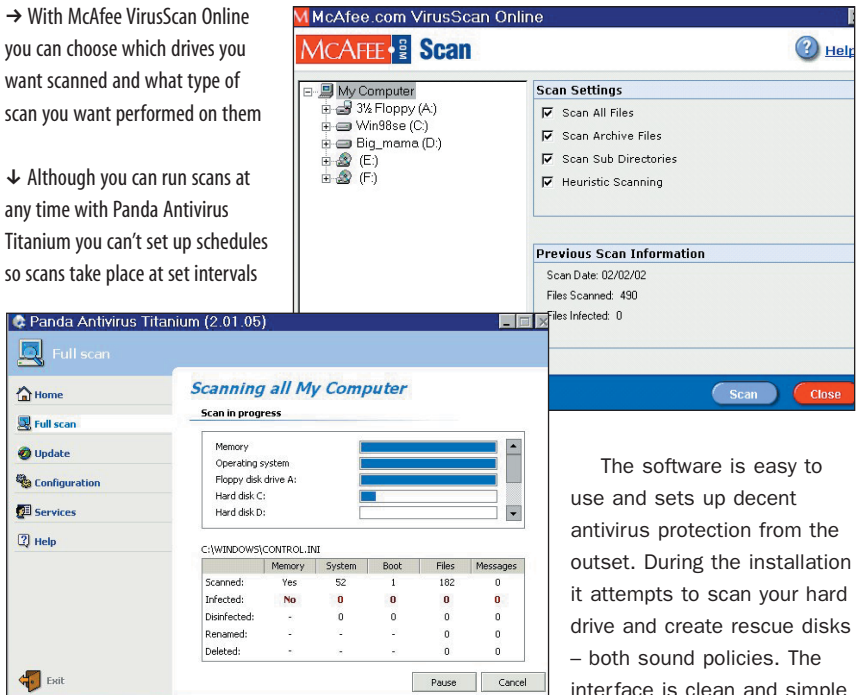
McAfee VirusScan Online

With VSO (VirusScan Online), McAfee shows what might be the future of software distribution, where we rent programs from online ASPs (application service providers) rather than buying them from a PC store. As its name suggests, the product is only available online.

You start by registering your username and password at the McAfee UK website, before waiting a couple of minutes for an email to arrive confirming your registration. Then it's back to the site to purchase and download the VSO software. The download takes a couple of minutes on a DSL connection, but can last up to 30 minutes on a 56Kbps (kilobits per second) modem link. Once the software is installed and you've rebooted you'll be asked at what time of the day you want VirusScan to automatically check for updates. The VirusScan applet will then sit in your system tray monitoring for virus activity in the background.

Unfortunately, that's as far as it goes. It doesn't automatically scan your PC upon installation and you can't schedule scans at set times. All these tasks have to be done manually and anything that has to be done manually is always prone to be forgotten. The software also doesn't scan

→ With McAfee VirusScan Online you can choose which drives you want scanned and what type of scan you want performed on them

↓ Although you can run scans at any time with Panda Antivirus Titanium you can't set up schedules so scans take place at set intervals

incoming emails for viruses (it only scans the attachments folder) and there's no support for blocking malicious scripts on the internet. At least with this latest version of VSO the scanning files are held on your computer so you don't need to be online to carry out a scan.

All in all we felt that VirusScan Online wasn't the comprehensive antivirus suite we were hoping for.

Panda Antivirus Titanium

Panda Antivirus Titanium is a more traditional shrinkwrapped product. It's the latest version of the company's top antivirus suite with support for Windows XP.

The software is easy to use and sets up decent antivirus protection from the outset. During the installation it attempts to scan your hard drive and create rescue disks – both sound policies. The interface is clean and simple with the overall status of the software and its various components shown on the opening 'home' screen. There isn't a whole lot to configure in Titanium as most of the security options are set up with good settings by default, but it's still easy to get at those options you may want to tweak.

Titanium attempts to update itself every time it detects an internet connection so this should ensure you always have up-to-date virus definition. There's also support for scanning incoming email, but malicious scripts from the internet are not blocked by the software.

On the whole, we were impressed with Titanium's slick interface and low price, but felt it lacks some of the features of its main competitors such as the ability to block scripts and to schedule regular scans.

Verdict

Out of the two products on test here the definite front-runner is Panda Antivirus Titanium. It's a far more comprehensive package than VirusScan Online. However, we still think that Norton AntiVirus 2002 offers better all-round protection than either of these products. ■

Niall Magennis

McAfee VirusScan Online		
System requirements: 486 processor; Windows 95/98/Me/NT/2000; 16MB RAM; 10MB hard disk space.		
McAfee: www.mcafee.co.uk		
Price: £15		

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use							6				
Features					5						
Value for money							6				
Overall							**6**				

Panda Antivirus Titanium		
System requirements: 90MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/XP/2000 Pro/NT 4.0/Me; 32MB RAM, 20MB hard disk space.		
Panda: 0870 444 5640		
Website: www.pandasoftware.com		
Price: £20		

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8		
Features								7			
Value for money									8		
Overall								**7**			

Photo-editing software
Adobe Photoshop 7.0 beta

↑ With Photoshop 7.0 it is easier to customise, save and manage brushes and other editing tools

Adobe's flagship photo-editing and image production package is due an upgrade in April. Our test of a late beta version of the expected package reveals a solid and useful set of new features that should keep Photoshop at the top of the professional's list.

Brush tools have been enhanced with more texture variations, making genuinely realistic paint effects possible for the first time in the program. These can be created and managed from a new, convenient floating Brushes palette. All editing tool settings can be saved to a Tool Presets palette, so that skipping between several different brush (or any other tool) sizes, shapes, colours, opacity and so on is now just a one-click operation.

The old Clone Stamp is accompanied by Healing Brush and Patch tools, which both perform excellent retouching functions with virtually no effort. The Healing Brush is ideal for removing wrinkles, while Patch seamlessly removes unwanted marks over textured areas. Functions within the Liquify window for distorting pictures have also been developed, even letting you save distortion meshes for applying to other images.

The bundled web image processor, ImageReady, has also been improved, with better management of JavaScript rollovers and more flexible and intuitive options for GIF transparency. A good touch is the ability to prioritise isolated elements in an image for gentler optimisation when saving to web graphics formats, such as vector shapes and text.

Beyond this, Photoshop has gained several valuable additions such as the File Browser nabbed from Photoshop Elements, a multi-language spellchecker, a tiling Pattern Maker, and more options for creating Picture Packages and web galleries.

Verdict

Although not as compelling an upgrade as previous versions were, Photoshop 7.0 will benefit digital artists, photographers and web designers. ■
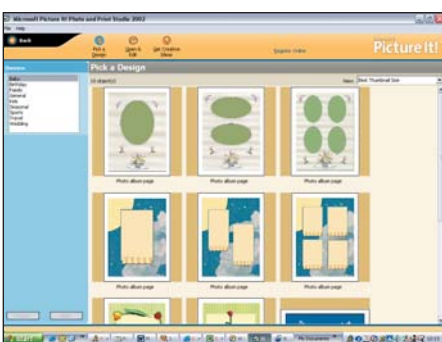
Alistair Dabbs

Adobe Photoshop 7.0 beta		
System requirements: Pentium PC; Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 150MB hard disk space.		
Adobe: 020 8606 4000		
Website: www.adobe.co.uk		
Price: £499, £115 upgrade		

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features									8		
Value for money									8		
Overall									**8**		

Image-editing and manipulation software
Picture It Photo and Print Studio

Digital imaging has never been more popular, whether using photos taken with a digital camera or conventional snaps that have been scanned in. While the means of acquiring digital photos might be easier than ever, using them to create compelling documents and websites is not so simple.

↑ If you like the look of these templates then Picture It might be worth a try. If not steer well clear

With Picture It Photo and Print Studio Microsoft aims to turn even the most amateur designer into a graphic artist, allowing any user to create professional cards, invitations, newsletters, business cards, websites and plenty more.

Unfortunately the basis of these projects is a range of truly hideous templates, so if you have no taste at all then this is the ideal software for you, as it's easy to incorporate your own photos into a range of sickly sweet or plain ugly designs. You can also draw up your own designs, but things don't really get any better: while the software is set up to guide you through the whole process, it's woefully unintuitive.

Trying to cut out an image was tricky. You are only offered the option to crop images out of a picture and keep the border, rather than cut out and copy the image you want. It may be possible to do this with Picture It, but we never found out how. Equally, trying to build an animated greetings card from scratch was a painful process of trial and error – with the emphasis on error. So we dread to think how a novice would fare.

Verdict

We were surprised by Picture It as Microsoft's software is normally very impressive, but this one really misses the mark. To be fair if you are happy to use the horrible templates it is easy to use, but if you want to add your own style to projects (and you will) you are better off using a program like Jasc's Paint Shop Pro which offers you more freedom to create. ■

Ursula Tolaini

Microsoft Picture It Photo and Print Studio		
System requirements: 166MHz Pentium processor; 64MB RAM; 390MB hard disk space.		
Microsoft: 0870 601 0100		
Website: www.microsoft.com		
Price: £41.99		

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use					4						
Features						5					
Value for money					4						
Overall					**4**						

Web and multimedia design software
# Adobe LiveMotion 2.0 beta and Macromedia Flash MX beta

Every decent design package these days can export Flash animations for use on the internet, but this is a far cry from what you can do with Macromedia's Flash application. Adobe nipped at its heels with the animation-focused LiveMotion a couple of years ago, and is hoping to take a bigger bite with version 2.0. At the same time, Macromedia is preparing a new release of Flash – dubbed 'MX' instead of the expected '6.0'. We tested beta versions of both packages to see how they compare.

Leaping ahead
LiveMotion 1.0 and Flash 5.0 were never on a par. LiveMotion was useful for creating animated sequences, but Flash could do this plus a vast range of other design tasks. LiveMotion 2.0's key upgrade enhancement is the introduction of scripting using ActionScript. You can now use it to produce fully interactive elements as you could with Flash, raising the program to professional-league status.

Flash MX has improved its own ActionScripting interface with colour coding and hints in its Script Editor, along with a rigorous Debugger. In fact, many aspects of the program interface have been cleaned up and developed in useful ways, such as the excellent all-in-one-view Color Mixer panel and a much improved Timeline.

But where Flash MX really has the edge is in backroom server support and essential delivery features, such as dynamic loading of images and audio as Flash content plays back in the browser window. This leaves enormous potential for
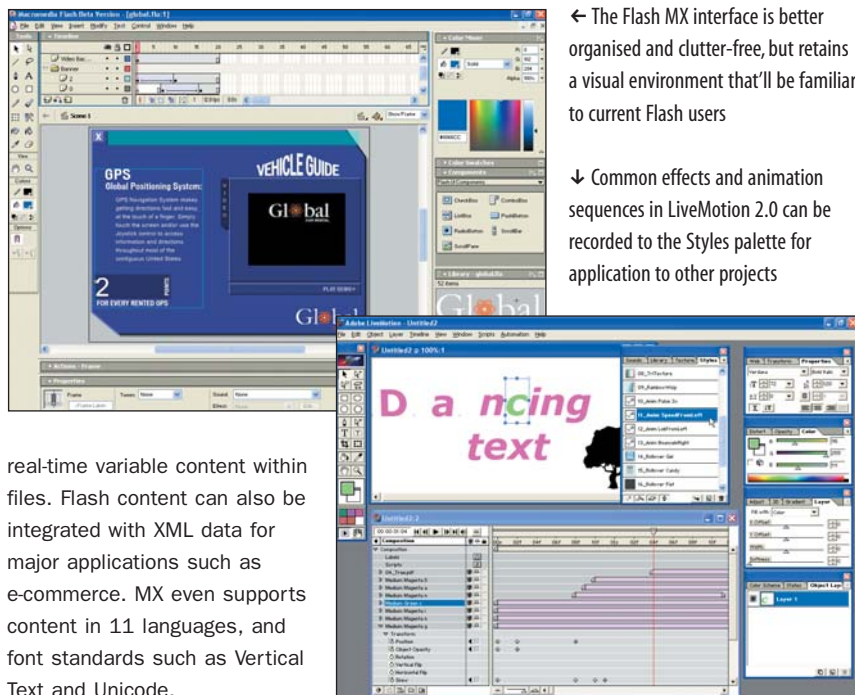
← The Flash MX interface is better organised and clutter-free, but retains a visual environment that'll be familiar to current Flash users

↓ Common effects and animation sequences in LiveMotion 2.0 can be recorded to the Styles palette for application to other projects

real-time variable content within files. Flash content can also be integrated with XML data for major applications such as e-commerce. MX even supports content in 11 languages, and font standards such as Vertical Text and Unicode.

Stepping up
By contrast, LiveMotion 2.0 is playing catch-up with the likes of Flash 4.0 and 5.0. As well as the scripting support, for example, coders can give Flash-based front-end interfaces to their scripts within LiveMotion itself to make them more user-friendly to designers. This has been a key feature in recent versions of Flash, and now it's in LiveMotion too.

In other respects, however, especially in its approach to graphics creation, LiveMotion 2.0 feels like the better package. It has a nice line in special effects and can export animations as high-quality QuickTime movies, so would be a

handy addition alongside Adobe Premiere and After Effects. For that matter, its ability to work with native Illustrator and Photoshop formats, including layer and sequence information, can't be ignored. It still can't open Flash SWF files for editing (obviously Flash MX can), but it's possible to combine them into your own projects.

So it seems both programs have pushed forward, but whether they will bring all their users with them is another matter. From the designer's point of view, LiveMotion 2.0 is still easier to use, but now with the much-needed scripting ability. From the content developer's point of view, nothing less than Flash MX will do the trick, reaching deep into the complexities of sophisticated content delivery.

Verdict
Flash MX remains the undisputed leader in interactive Flash-based content delivery, offering both design tools and technical backroom support for mission-critical applications. LiveMotion 2.0 is the creative-friendly alternative. Featuring ActionScript but lacking the full-on MX approach, it is offered at a bargain price. ■

Alistair Dabbs

Adobe LiveMotion 2.0 beta
System requirements: Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 50MB hard disk space.

Adobe: 020 8606 4001
Website: www.adobe.co.uk
Price: £149, upgrade £69

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use							6				
Features								7			
Value for money										9	
Overall									8		

Macromedia Flash MX beta
System requirements: 200MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space.

Macromedia: 01344 458 600
Website: www.macromedia.com/uk
Price: £269, upgrade £99

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use						5					
Features									8		
Value for money									8		
Overall									8		

Web design software
Adobe GoLive 6.0 beta

Throughout the ebb and flow of the web design rivalry between Adobe GoLive and Macromedia Dreamweaver, the one constant has been Dreamweaver's lead in high-end site management features. Adobe clearly relishes a challenge, however and, judging by this beta release, GoLive 6.0 will take the program into Dreamweaver territory and in many ways reverse the balance of power.

GoLive's fresh approach is signalled from the outset by a new site management wizard, but its intentions are fully confirmed by one stunning new addition to the program: the Web Workgroup Server.
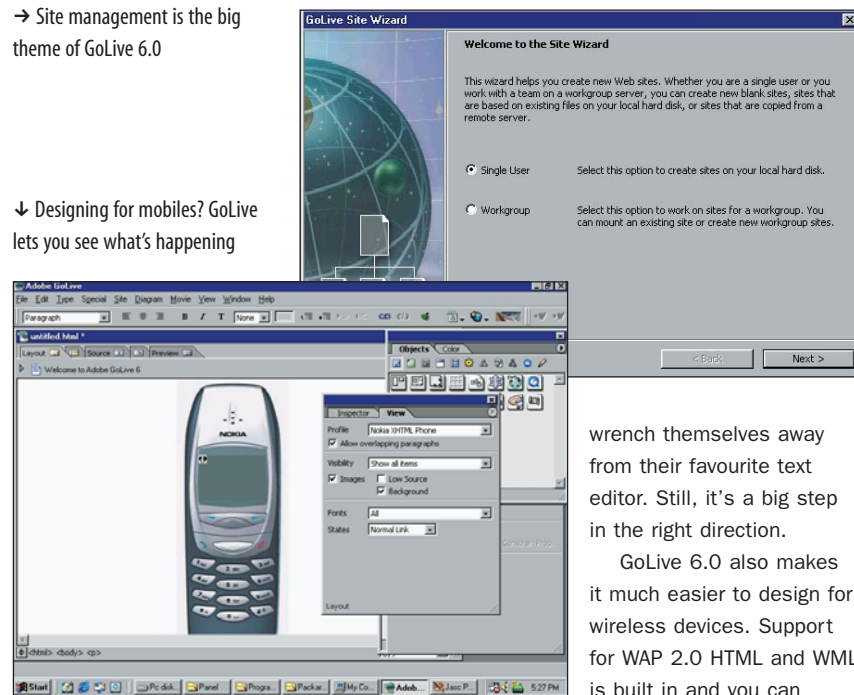
Serving you right
The Workgroup Server, part of Adobe's network publishing initiative, is a separate application that manages your site's digital assets on a local server. Among other features, it supports both revisions and versioning, which means you can easily trace the editing process, viewing different editions of files – in any markup language – side by side.

The ability to track site items and rewind if necessary to previous versions of a file will prove a godsend. Administrators will also appreciate the ability to take site snapshots and perform site maintenance via synchronisation. Of more long-term significance will be the ability of all Adobe products – from InDesign to the upcoming Photoshop 7.0 – to make use of the same asset management tool. In mixed print and web design spheres – which make up a

→ Site management is the big theme of GoLive 6.0

↓ Designing for mobiles? GoLive lets you see what's happening

large proportion of the web design market – this is as near to a killer feature as you'll get.

Object of my affection
GoLive 6.0 also marks the web design debut of another impressive cross-media feature: Smart Object variables. These allow you to attach variables, stored either in a script or a central database, to objects contained in a page. An obvious use is the ability to dynamically update prices in a web catalogue without touching a page's source code, but the concept extends beyond text objects – links, styles and even object visibility can all be changed on the fly.

Smart Object variables also crop up in other Adobe applications, providing further evidence of the company's clever leveraging of its position in the design field. Further examples here include the ability to import sliced images directly from Illustrator and support for Photoshop vector layers. Creators of dynamic sites will also applaud belated native support for PHP and JSP scripting languages, although it's arguable whether hardened coders will be impressed enough to

wrench themselves away from their favourite text editor. Still, it's a big step in the right direction.

GoLive 6.0 also makes it much easier to design for wireless devices. Support for WAP 2.0 HTML and WML is built in and you can preview wireless content directly in a GoLive window.

Not everything in this new version is a success, however: Adobe makes much of a diagramming tool that allows you to construct an overview of your site and export it to PDF format, but it looks a little underpowered. Even so, most of the small changes – including better table handling and the ability to easily customise page layout – are all the more welcome for their unobtrusiveness.

GoLive's progress from a simple layout package to powerful web development environment has been remarkably smooth. The only penalty to be paid – a growing army of tabbed palettes and lengthy menu options – is offset by usability pluses: dragging any palette tab to the edge of the screen automatically minimises it, and you can now create and store a personalised GoLive workspace.

Verdict
The addition of server software will increase GoLive's appeal in mixed-media production environments, so dedicated hand coders and single users alike will love this new version. ■

Tom Gorham

Adobe GoLive 6.0 beta
System requirements: 400MHz Pentium; Windows 98/2000/Me/XP; 96MB RAM; 90MB hard disk space.

Adobe: 020 8606 4000
Website: www.adobe.com
Price: TBA

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8		
Features										9	
Value for money										9	
Overall										9	

Contact management software
Cardscan Executive

We may be living in increasingly digital times, working towards the paperless office, but ask a colleague for a contact's phone number and they'll invariably delve into a stack of business cards, desperately searching for the right one. It might work in the end, but it's hardly hi-tech.

↑ Cardscan keeps a copy of the business card as well as adding the details to your contacts

Enter Cardscan – a system that captures and sorts your business cards for you, meaning you'll never have to reach for the pile again. Cardscan Executive comes with a bundled USB colour business card scanner, although you can buy a software-only version that works with any Twain scanner.

The software combines OCR (optical character recognition) with AccuCard logic to match information with the right fields like phone number, email and so on. Cards can be scanned individually or in batches and then processed. Records then have to be checked for accuracy – to make sure that the correct information has gone into the right place and that no errors have been made. The software shows the scanned image of the card, so you've always got it to refer to.

Business cards range from the simple or arty to the extravagant – usually depending on the pretensions of the company in question. Although Cardscan handles simple text and layouts better, it's consistently accurate. We did find one card it just couldn't handle (shiny, with dark blue lettering on a black background) but it was an exception.

The bundled Intellisync plug-in allows you to synchronise your Cardscan database with popular contact managers, like Lotus Notes, Outlook and Act.

Verdict
The whole system works incredibly well and is quicker than entering everything by hand. Cost is a downside but, if it means you'll never shuffle through that mound of business cards again, it may be worth it. ■

Will Head

Cardscan Executive

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 98/Me/2000; 64MB RAM; 35MB hard disk space.

Widget: 01438 818 818
Website: www.widget.co.uk
Price: £230

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use									8		
Features									8		
Value for money							6				
Overall								7			

Video-editing software
PureMotion EditStudio 3.0

Are you ready to take movie making on your computer beyond the basics? Here's a package that optimistically promises 'professional video editing for everyone'.
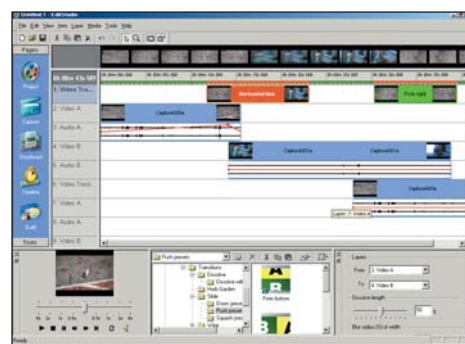
↑ Multi-layered video editing made easy(ish)

Unusually, and rather pointlessly, EditStudio prompts you to select an output format for your finished work right at the outset. The choices include Real Media, QuickTime, Mpeg and DV (digital video) – the last being particularly suited to high-quality video captured from a digital camcorder through a FireWire card.

Once a source device – typically a camcorder – is connected to the computer, the first step is to capture some video to hard disk. This can be done with or without compression. Individual scenes are detected and separated on the fly and, in our tests, the program barely dropped a frame.

EditStudio incorporates two ways to make a film from your footage: a storyboard view, where captured clips may be dragged, dropped and arranged into roughly the right order; and a timeline view, where the full range of features – including scene transitions, special effects, trimming, titles, credits and audio editing – comes into play. The timeline also supports an unlimited number of 'layers', on which clips, soundtracks and effects can be overlaid one on top of the other for advanced mixing effects.

Come completion, you simply click the Build button, confirm the desired output format, and leave EditStudio to render and produce the film.

While this is not exactly a hit-the-ground-running application (it's considerably less intuitive than entry-level programs from the likes of MGI and Pinnacle) it does repay patience and practice.

Verdict
Situated somewhere between basic and semi-professional video editing, EditStudio will last you a while. However, you'll need a separate program if you want to showcase your movie work on a DVD player. ■

Kyle MacRae

PureMotion EditStudio 3.0

System requirements: 350MHz Pentium II; Windows 98SE/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space (plus a recommended 4GB for captured footage).

PureMotion: 07092 265 529
Website: www.puremotion.com
Price: £67 (£50 for the download-only version)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features									8		
Value for money									8		
Overall									8		